

*Wage, Trade, and Exchange in Melanesia: A Manus Society in the Modern State*, by James G. Carrier and Achsah H. Carrier. Studies in Melanesian Anthropology Series no. 7. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. ISBN 0-520-06389-9, xvii + 257 pp, figures, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. US\$35.

In *Wage, Trade, and Exchange in Melanesia: A Manus Society in the Modern State*, James and Achsah Carrier argue persuasively that rural pre-capitalist villages should be examined in the context of the larger capitalist economies that encompass them. The authors examine changes in the small island society of Ponam, just north of Manus Island in the Manus Province of Papua New Guinea, using their own ethnographic observations (from several visits between 1978 and 1986), those of Mead and Fortune from fifty years ago from another area of Manus, and archival sources. The Carriers suggest that many aspects of Ponam life, even those that appear most "traditional," have been altered by colonization and by the participation of Ponam workers in a national capitalist economy; they caution that anthropologists have probably overlooked similar influences in other areas.

The Carriers set out to explore the relationship between rural villages and capitalist nations, drawing extensively, but not uncritically, on the work of Meillassoux (*Maidens, Meal and Money*, 1981) and Gregory (*Man* 15 [1980]: 626-652; *Gifts and Commodities*, 1982). Meillassoux suggests that it is in the interests of capitalist systems to preserve tradition in encapsulated

rural areas, because this allows owners to pay low wages to their workers since these men usually leave their wives and children to live by subsistence farming in the village. The Carriers applaud Meillassoux for recognizing the intimate connections between seemingly pristine traditional lifestyles and larger capitalist economies, but object that "tradition" in rural areas is not mummified as Meillassoux suggests; instead, local practices are altered by the wider national economy. In order to understand the "articulation" of village and capitalist economies from the village perspective, the authors turn to Gregory who suggests that wage labor feeds money into rural, pre-capitalist villages and leads to an expansion of traditional "gift exchange" systems.

The Carriers use this theoretical apparatus to examine Ponam history. Ponam Islanders (like other Manus people) have been more successful than most other Papua New Guinea groups in attaining high levels of education and relatively high-paying skilled office jobs in urban areas. Those who remain on Ponam continue to fish and to trade sago with neighboring Manus groups but they are dependent on money remitted by migrant workers. This has not, however, led to a collapse of traditional social organization and exchange. Instead, local production (mostly in the form of fishing) is organized according to kin and clan relations and is still governed by a pre-capitalist logic: people owning "capital" in the form of fishing rights or equipment do not amass wealth, but instead accumulate social credit by giving away fish. Ponam Islanders still hold traditional markets where they exchange

their fish for the sago of a neighboring group, and exchanges (associated with major life events such as marriage and death) within the village are flourishing.

Closer examination reveals that many of these activities have been subtly altered by colonization and participation in the capitalist economy. Most dramatically, *lapan* or financier big men who previously rose to the top of Manus society by manipulating bride-wealth payments and exchanges with neighboring groups, have now disappeared because the most significant sources of wealth (from wage labor) are now beyond their control, and because the extensive system of regional interdependence and trade that existed prior to contact has largely collapsed. Moreover, the limited form of regional trade that has survived (the fish and sago market) is now supported by cash that comes largely from migrant workers since the Manus Island sago producers now fish for themselves and have little need for Ponam fish.

The Carriers then examine the "articulation" of the Ponam Island economy with the wider capitalist economy in some detail. They find that the elaborate system of intravillage exchanges allows villagers to capture the money of migrant workers because the migrants are obliged to send home money to contribute to exchanges in order to maintain their standing as "good" people in the community, to accumulate social credit, and to retain their access to local resources they will need when they eventually retire and return to the island. In short, migrants supply the villagers with money, and in

turn the villagers take care of the production of social identities and relations. Each group is dependent on the other, and, most important, migrants remain committed to village life and continue to send money home.

The Carriers are to be commended for pointing to, and carefully illustrating, the importance of considering village societies both in historical perspective and in relation to the outside world. It is all too tempting to assume that strange behaviors are traditional and apparently isolated villages are largely untouched by the outside world, but few who read this study will not be made aware of the dangers of such a perspective. The work is also valuable for its attempts to move beyond a particular case and to develop a more general model of the relationship between rural villages and larger economies, and thus should be of interest to scholars of development and underdevelopment.

My criticisms are minor. While the Carriers quite convincingly show why migrants remain committed to Ponam, it is less clear why village families with migrant children are interested in maintaining mutual aid relations and sharing their wealth through the exchange system (which tends to redistribute migrant wealth equally throughout the village) with less fortunate fellow villagers? One might expect a deterioration of local exchange and informal aid as village families become increasingly oriented toward maintaining ties with migrant workers who control the most significant source of wealth, and correspondingly less interested in maintaining ties with fellow villagers. This has not happened on

Ponam, but the Carriers do not fully explain why. This, however, is a relatively minor flaw in an important work.

KAREN BRISON  
Washington University

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*The French Presence in the South Pacific, 1842–1940*, by Robert Aldrich. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989. ISBN 0–8248–1268–9, xii + 387 pp, maps, notes, bibliography, index. US\$35.

Robert Aldrich has performed a considerable service by providing students and historians with a work of synthesis on the French Pacific territories, from their occupation in the early nineteenth century until the eve of considerable political change after the 1940s. It is hard to think of any work in French or English that summarizes quite so well this long phase of French imperialism and colonization among the marginal possessions of a European power whose interests lay elsewhere. Explaining this phenomenon of French incursion into an “Anglo-Saxon” sphere is almost as difficult as accounting for the continuation of a “French presence” long after the period of decolonization.

The book contains little that is new in the way of argument about imperial expansion in a somewhat sketchy first chapter dealing with the chronology of French annexations and protection in the three main groups—East Polynesia, New Caledonia, and the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). There is a more solid account of the background factors in three chapters on the French navy,

French missions, and French economic interests, so far as these can be adduced from old and some new materials on trading houses, shipping firms, and banks. Lack of any trade or financial series precludes a serious analysis of the scale and proportion of French metropolitan commercial exchanges and investment at any phase of the period covered by the book. On the other hand, there are some excellent insights into the importance of operations conducted by the Banque de l’Indochine et Suez from the work of Yasua Gondjo, and good use has been made of Anne-Gabrielle Thompson’s study of John Higginson. The gap that still exists in our knowledge of the influence and profitability of Le Nickel, however, cannot yet be filled. More might have been made of the financial role of French administrations in the economies of the three territories. Government, after all, was the largest of the few investors, over the longest period, and had a considerable place in creating a market for imports, employing labor, and securing the limited amount of infrastructure and urbanization that developed around the main ports and capitals. The chapter on settlers and officials plays down this official (and metropolitan) action over a century of taxation, budgets, and capital expenditure.

Chapter six on “The French and the Islanders” is a brave attempt to cover the most difficult theme of all, namely the results of cultural change, miscegenation, education, and a century of accommodation among island societies. Perhaps more space should have been allowed to analyze the elements of resistance and syncretism